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ABSTRACT

This paper describes attempts to bring writing center planning for a global, multicultural world to Rivier College, New Hampshire, a small, predominantly white, Catholic college. It explains how the writing center has been instrumental in leading this planning process. The process began with education on four broad issues regarding diversity and multiculturalism (expanding Rivier's reach as a community resource; reconceptualizing the way people thought about time, space, and people in the context of Rivier College's values; responding to demographic and market demands through student-centered initiatives; and evaluating the fiscal viability of meeting these goals). Ultimately, Rivier was directed to examine the creative tension between its vision and its current reality. Rivier's Writing Center director helped design a proposal for an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) Writing Advisor pilot program, hired writing advisors, and invited ESL students to participate in weekly tutorial sessions. Although the program provided services for some students, it met with limited success. For example, it is a non-credit-bearing, non-integrated pilot tutorial program and does not always adequately serve students' needs. The college has since revised and institutionalized the director's position and reiterated the recommendation to continue a revised Writing Advisor Program as a supplement to other ESL offerings. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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"*E Pluribus Unum:* Writing Center Planning for a Global, Multicultural World"

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Rivier College

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"*E Pluribus Unum:* Writing Center Planning for a Global, Multicultural World"

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Rivier College

The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them. *Albert Einstein*

In much literature, we read about the value of diversity. New works about college life, including Richard Light's *Making the Most of College*, continue to point out the advantages of preparing students for a multicultural world. Valora Washington and J. D. Andrews, in *Children of 2010*, point to the demographic reasons why we need to plan for more diversity and thus to include multicultural perspectives in our teaching and learning programs. Their research and that of their colleagues in the social sciences also tell us of the value of diversity in K-12 and Higher Education, particularly, in preparing our students for larger civic responsibility, for employment, and for opportunity and achievement. Critical theorists Lisa Delpit and Theresa Perry point out, theoretically, the value of transcending our racist tendencies in order to bring about a more enlightened world in which all people's strengths make that world more tolerant and thus more creative and productive.

In the writing center field, Gail Okawa told us about the benefits of the multicultural writing center in 1991; readers may recall that the tutorial staff in her Writing Center in Seattle was representative of the university's demographics. Okawa then pointed out the benefits that accrued to her Center as a result of its multicultural staff. In 1998 and in 2001, Susan Blau, John Hall, Tracy Strauss, Jeff Davis, and Lauren

Gravitz told us about what is expected by students who speak languages other than English. They point out that these students may advance through analyses of their drafts with tutors who are sensitive to their particular, often culturally determined, language concerns. Throughout the nineties, in many articles and in her co-edited book, *Writing in Multicultural Settings*, Carol Severino has directed writing center workers to be sensitive to the language and cultural differences of students who speak languages other than English. In "Addressing Racial Diversity in a Writing Center: Stories and Lessons from Two Beginners," Nancy Barron and Nancy Grimm take a critical look at the writing center community's celebration of diversity, on the one hard, and its championing acculturation, on the other. They note that, while difference in writing should be poignant in a writing center, the writing center becomes, unfortunately, the place where students attempt to read and to write as if there were no difference.

Related theorists, like Keith Gilyard, Tom Fox, Victor Villanueva, and the current Okawa, to name some, talk about the ways in which people of color can transform (*and thus do not need to be transformed by*) the academy in which the writing center has an important role. In the political world, activist, professor, and writer Cornel West argues, in *Race Matters*, that if DuBois is correct—i.e., "the problem of the twentieth [and now the twenty-first] century is the problem of the color line" (xxiv)— then we need "race-transcending" leadership. And in the newly-released book, *The Miner's Canary*, Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres use the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr., and American Indian law to outline a plan for "race-transcending" leadership, asserting that people of color should join with poor and working class whites who suffer from the same social injustices to overcome those injustices.

In 1998, in the lead article for the Fall/Winter *Writing Center Journal*, Patti Stock tells us that writing center workers are agents of change. As such, she argues, they must assume leadership roles in the academy. In assuming leadership roles, writing center workers may indeed lead the planning for a global, multicultural world. In this paper, I want to tell you about how I attempted to bring this kind of planning to Rivier College, a small co-educational, Catholic college in Southern New Hampshire. And I want to explain how the Writing Center has been instrumental in leading this process of planning. The success of this global, multicultural planning has helped the College, even though strapped financially, to maintain its commitment to students who speak languages other than English.

Who is Valora Washington?

Dr. Valora Washington is executive director of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Service Committee has worked to advance human rights and social justice in more than 50 countries since 1939.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee's program priorities focus on building women's capacity to build civil societies, supporting the civil and political rights of indigenous people and oppressed racial and ethnic minorities, and protecting children from injustice. The Service Committee also responds to disasters, particularly where human rights are threatened.

A leader in children's issues, Washington has published extensively, received numerous honors, and serves on several boards and commissions. Her recently released book, *Children of 2010*, with co-author J. D. Andrews, wrestles with the trends,

problems, and opportunities that families face in an increasingly diverse society. Her concern for best practices and action strategies was further applied in her role as chairperson of the National Commission on Head Start 2010, which issued its report in June 2000. Dr. Washington also served on the boards of Beacon Press, the National Association of Child Advocates and President Clinton's Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. For her work on behalf of children and families, Washington has received several honors. Prior to joining the Service Committee, she served in administrative and faculty roles at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Antioch College, American University, Howard University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

I worked with Valora Washington during 1999-2000 while she led a series of six three-hour seminars for staff, administration, and faculty at Wheelock College where I was Dean of the Graduate School. Those seminars were based on the work she did in 1998 with J. D. Andrews for the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, which became the basis for *Children of 2010*. Among her many ideas is the following: "It is imperative that everyone explore the implications of the new diversity and how we, as a society, can set course toward constructive and inclusive outcomes that will benefit everyone" (9).

When I asked her to come to Rivier College, I hoped that Washington might focus on four broad areas with respect to issues of diversity and multiculturalism at my predominantly white college and that she might suggest, theoretically and procedurally, how these ideas could help us to reestablish programming for speakers of other languages (You see, the College had a program for its large Asian population, but when the director chose to take a position elsewhere, the program was abandoned. Moreover, in the

communities surrounding the College, there is a growing Southeast Asian, Indian, Spanish-speaking, and African-American population and, thus, a growing need to have programming for speakers of other languages.) Those four areas included:

1. Expanding Rivier's reach as a community resource as well as a distinguished and dynamic higher learning institution in the 21st century;
2. Reconceptualizing the way we think about time, space, and people in the context of Rivier College's values;
3. Responding to demographic demands as well as to those of the market through student-centered initiatives;
4. Evaluating the fiscal viability of meeting these goals.

In undertaking this planning, Washington helped us look at the following:

1. Diversity is certain; unity is the challenge;
2. Strategic planning should focus on national ideals, principles of faith, demographics, and direct instruction;
3. As systems change, acknowledge what is deeply personal.

She also helped us examine the implications of our work:

1. What do we mean by "faith in action"? what are the intellectual tradition and social teachings of the church?

2. In what ways is integrated learning a shared responsibility?
3. How can we ensure social and economic justice for all?
4. How do we put the plight of powerless at the center of an internal dialogue?
5. How do we remain aligned with current circumstances and strategies, i.e., the external dialogue?

Washington ultimately directed us to look at the creative tension between our vision and our current reality. She pointed out that creative tension seeks resolution. She warned, however, that in seeking resolution, parties have choices: They can allow conditions to rise to meet the vision, or they can lower the vision to coincide with current reality. Washington announced that mediocrity could result in a rush to resolve tension.

ESOL Writing Advisor Pilot Program Report: A Story about Creative Tension Seeking Resolution

Overview of Pilot Program

In late September 2000, I worked with Rivier's Writing Center Director to design a proposal for an English as a Second Language Writing Advisor Program to be piloted for the remainder of the 2000-2001 academic year. This pilot program was deemed necessary and mission-related. Moreover, since there had been a yearlong vacancy in the College's position of Director of ESL (now ESOL: English for Speakers of Other Languages), the peer-tutoring based proposal was finalized and approved and became a precursor for a reinstitution of the ESOL director's position.

The Coordinator of this pilot program. compiled a list of undergraduate and

graduate level students who had the qualifications for the Writing Advisor positions. She screened these students and interviewed six interested candidates, from which she selected two extremely qualified and enthusiastic undergraduate English Education majors. She compiled training manuals highlighting the latest ESOL research, pedagogy, and methodology, and she met with the advisors for the two-week training. I then intervened by bringing Carol Severino to campus, who helped writing center staff, writing program instructors, and writing advisors to understand how they might better work with students who speak languages other than English.

During the same time, the Coordinator compiled a list of ESOL students enrolled in Writing Core courses. These students (identified by their Writing instructors as ESOL) were invited to a gathering at which time the program would be explained and their participation would be encouraged. Then, the writing advisors contacted each interested student about scheduling possibilities and, upon the completion of their two-week training period, weekly tutorials. At this time, each advisor held tutorials with two ESOL students. Several other ESOL students expressed a desire to participate, but wished to postpone their participation until the start of the spring semester. The advisors and Coordinator met weekly throughout the rest of the fall semester and during the spring semester. These meetings were necessary to share observations and successes and to keep track of questions and concerns of the tutorial program.

Weekly tutorials began in the spring semester with current students and with those who, at the information session, indicated a preference for this later opportunity. We also sent out individual invitations to ESOL students enrolled in spring core writing courses. During the beginning half of the spring semester, the advisors tutored a total of seven

undergraduate students, three of whom were returnees from fall tutorials.

After Valora Washington visited campus, the advisors and Coordinator designed a spin-off program to address the needs of graduate-level students who desired opportunities to practice their oral English skills. After publicizing the weekly opportunities at a kick-off pizza luncheon, advisors hosted "Cafeteria Conversations" each Tuesday at noon for the rest of the spring semester. This program was attended exclusively by graduate students, primarily in the Computer Science program, and was generally well attended and well received. These students expressed to the advisors the desire to continue this drop-in program.

Assessment of Pilot Program

Although the Pilot Program provided services for some students for a portion of the year, it met with limited success in some ways as well. Ultimately, a non-credit-bearing, non-integrated pilot tutorial program is not the solution and does not serve in adequate ways the very real needs of these students. Rather, such a program could best serve these populations in a supplementary capacity to a sequenced and supervised offering of ESOL credit-bearing courses and/or tutorial opportunities.

The writing advisors' perspectives also demonstrate the benefits and limitations of the pilot program. Clearly, the advisors learned a tremendous amount about the intricacies of one-on-one tutoring and the challenges that ESOL students face. Additionally, each was able to develop a stronger understanding of multicultural issues while building relationships with student peers. Both agree, however, that the needs of these ESOL students go far beyond what this pilot program was able to offer them.

Recommendations for Future Programming

Ultimately, with the help of Valora Washington, Carol Severino, and the experiences of the pilot program, we recommended to central administration that (1) the College reinstitute the ESOL Director's position and (2) that a revised Writing Advisor Program be continued as a supplement to other ESOL offerings, should a future ESOL Director be interested in such a program.

Looking to 2010

To resolve its creative tension in a way that would transcend mediocrity, the College has endeavored to ensure that the conditions would rise to meet the vision. We reinstated a director's position, albeit at half time! She has worked the entire 2001-2002 academic year, and has helped us to revise and reenergize the program for speakers of other languages. Below is a list of the director's reporting line and responsibilities, developed as a result of the work the director has already undertaken:

Reporting Line and Responsibilities

- Report to the Academic Dean of the College;
- Work with non-native speakers of English as well as with American speakers whose native culture(s) and languages(s) are not English-related;
- Assess ESOL students' needs to recommend programming options;
- Plan programs for the ESOL population that will lead to competency in writing, reading, listening, and speaking at the college level;

- Tutor students registered in ESOL 100: Tutorial. This is a weekly one-credit tutorial open to any international student for the purpose of improving basic grammar and writing skills;
- Tutor ESOL students on a needs basis;
- Teach ESOL 310: English Speaking and Listening Skills. This course is designed specifically for those English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students who wish to improve their English listening and speaking skills. The content of the course focuses on practice with listening comprehension, speaking, and pronunciation. Underlying this focus is the assumption that improvement in these areas will ultimately improve reading and writing skills as well, resulting in an overall increase in English fluency. Non-credit. Pass/fail.
- Teach ESOL 499: English Communications for Academic Success. This non-credit course for graduate students will focus on an integrated approach toward increasing English fluency, especially with written and oral communication in a business/professional context. The course will give students the opportunity to practice learning in a discussion-based/collaborative classroom framework, which is common on most U.S. campuses. Students will prepare written work as well as give oral presentations. Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension will be addressed as part of the overall goal of improving English proficiency. Non-credit. Pass/Fail.
- Conduct pronunciation workshops for Undergraduate and Graduate students;
- Work with departments to identify and service the ESOL student population;
- Teach one class each semester for students who speak other languages;

- Attend Writing Core meetings;
- Serve on Retention Action Committee;
- Attend Writing Center meetings;
- Meet with department chairpersons when necessary;
- Maintain a database on ESOL students.

In addition to revising and now institutionalizing the director's position, I have reiterated the recommendation that a revised Writing Advisor Program be continued as a supplement to other ESOL offerings. Further, with the ESOL Director's assistance, we have written an Education Opportunity Center Trio grant proposal to assist students in applying to colleges and to add half time to her current position. As noted above, where before the ESL program was crafted for undergraduate students, she now conducts ongoing tutorials and coursework for graduate students. I think, regarding ESOL, we will continue to be driven by desire, not simply circumstances.

I believe that Rivier's commitment to social justice and global, multicultural planning is similar to the ideals of writing centers I know. Both agents are willing to think at a level far different from that which caused the problem, in this case—race. It also affirms one of the conclusions of Valora Washington's book:

> We have every reason to hope that our efforts will lead to the further evolution of U.S. democracy, one in which our society can provide fair access to opportunity for all children, one that progresses toward the goal of one nation indivisible. Such a vision cannot be left to chance; it requires our personal involvement and ongoing activism. (169)

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